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AF/S FOR S. HILL
NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR B. PITTMAN
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU
ADDIS ABABA FOR ACSS

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SUBJECT: ZANU-PF CONFERENCE POISED TO PROLONG MUGABE'S TERM

REF: REFTEL: HARARE 1413

Classified By: Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i., Eric T. Schultz
under Section 1.5 b/d

Summary

¶1. (C) The struggle to succeed Robert Mugabe has taken a twist in the run-up to the annual ZANU-PF conference slated for December 14-17. Although Mugabe in on record promising to step down in 2008, when the next presidential elections are scheduled, the conference appears likely to call for extending his term to 2010. ZANU-PF has sufficient votes in parliament to pass the required constitutional amendment, but the debate may expose further fault lines within the ruling party. The consequences for the country could catastrophic, with the risk of a disorderly succession increasing and needed economic reforms being delayed indefinitely. End Summary.

2010 Emerges As Likely Election Date

¶2. (C) The 82 year-old Mugabe announced in 2005 that he would not run in the 2008 presidential elections. Since that time, the succession struggle with-in ZANU-PF has intensified. Speculation has centered on two factions: one centered on Vice President Joyce Mujuru, wife of former Zimbabwean Defense Forces commander Solomon Mujuru; the other on the former heir apparent and one-time Speaker of Parliament Emmerson Mnangagwa. The Mujurus have had the upper hand since the last ZANU-PF Party Congress in 2004, which saw Joyce Mujuru elevated to the vice-presidency. However, Mugabe has continued to play the factions against

one another and has declined to name a successor.

13. (C) The internal maneuvering with-in ZANU-PF over the succession has largely been carried out behind closed doors. However, in recent weeks, as the conference has edged closer, the maneuvering has begun to spill out into the public. This past week saw a series of articles in government newspapers and the independent press, which taken together, seem to indicate that Mugabe may have finally chosen his immediate successor) himself) while putting off for several years the question of his ultimate successor.

14. (C) With the ZANU-PF Politburo having previously decided to support unification of the presidential election (scheduled for 2008) and the parliamentary election (scheduled for 2010) (reftel), pressure has mounted on the conference to support a consolidated election * and to support a 2010 date. Party leaders in six of the ten provinces reportedly have adopted resolutions calling for the national conference to do just that.

15. (C) Perhaps the strongest evidence that the party conference will support prolonging Mugabe's term to 2010 appeared in the December 2 edition of the government-controlled Herald under an editorial written by "Nathaniel Manheru") widely believed to be the penname of Mugabe's spokesperson George Charamba. The Manheru article begins with the ominous line "When Zimbabweans go to the polls in 2010(to choose their president and members of parliament(" An even more ominous trial balloon was floated by Security Minister Didymus Mutasa in the December 6 edition of an online independent newspaper, in which Mutasa is quoted

HARARE 00001465 002 OF 002

that "someone" at the conference may call for Mugabe to be made the ruling party's President-for-Life and permanent presidential candidate, and, given all Mugabe has done for his country, how could the party refuse.

Consequences

16. (C) Postponement of the presidential election to 2010, if it occurs, could expose fault lines within ZANU-PF. It would require a constitutional change by Parliament. ZANU-PF has had the two-thirds majority needed to amend the constitution at will since the March 2005 parliamentary elections. However, it has not been able to agree on what form that change should take, a symptom of the ruling party's broader inability to agree on a successor to Mugabe. The parliamentary vote would be open and would therefore likely produce public uniform agreement to the amendment, but those disappointed with extending Mugabe,s term in office, such as the Mujurus, could attempt to delay or circumvent it behind the scenes.

17. (C) In addition, the pressure on Mugabe to step aside may actually increase rather than dissipate as a result of a decision to stay in power and put off choosing a successor. Under Mugabe, the GOZ is unlikely to embrace the reforms needed to turn the economy around. In the absence of an economic revival, the party,s patronage system will continue to erode, the military and police will increasingly be under funded and ineffective, and the party,s popularity among ordinary Zimbabweans (those who remain) will likely continue to decline. Disappointed would be successors may feel their chance slipping away and may try to use the country,s economic freefall to bring pressure on Mugabe to step down before 2010.

18. (C) In the final analysis, if Mugabe follows through on his plans to extend his term in office, the chances of an orderly transition to his successor will be diminished. That may not matter to Mugabe, or to his inner circle who have will gained more time in which to loot the country. It will

matter to most Zimbabweans, including most of the rank and file of ZANU-PF. By hanging on to power until the bitter end, Mugabe may ensure the ruination of his party but, unfortunately, also the ruination of the country.

SCHULTZ